Joining Ship

The day of reckoning came in June 1968. I was posted to Ocean Shipping & Enterprises Ltd. of Hong Kong. It had its headquarters in Hong Kong and had a branch office in Singapore. This company had a sizeable fleet of more than 15 ships, most of which were new ships except for two older tonnages. To my disappointment, I was not posted to any of the modern ships but instead, to the oldest lady of the fleet, the s.s. Ocean Promoter.

Nevertheless, I had to prepare to join ship. My luggage was packed and made ready for immediate departure. My mother also gave me S$60 for contingency purposes and I felt great to keep that sum of money at hand. I was paid a training monthly allowance of S$100 and in those days, it was a very generous allowance for training cadets. Some of my classmates, who were posted to locally owned ships, were only given a meager $40 allowance. When I was working as a steel fabricator apprentice, I was earning only $60 per month and as a public work department worker, I was only earning about $1.50 per day. Seen in that context, I was very satisfied. Before departure, I also signed the papers to allot about $70 per month out of my monthly stipends to my mother.

Singapore was not a destined port of call for Ocean Promoter and I was asked to proceed to Bangkok to join ship. Instead of flying there to join ship, the company was kind enough to allow me to join my friend, Kuan on his ship, the mv Kota Singa to Bangkok. Kuan by then had already started his training on Kota Singa, a Singapore registered ship plying between Singapore and Bangkok. It was a small ship and captained by a local Malay home trade master.

On the day of departure, my mother prepared a lunch of pork liver and minced meat porridge for me. The ship was supposed to set sail from Eastern Anchorage at around 1800 hrs but to avoid an emotional departure; I decided to board the ship earlier. I timed the departure from our flat at noon on that very emotional day. The whole morning, I was racked internally by emotions, and hence remained very quiet for fear of crying openly in front of my brother and sisters. My mother gave me some last minute motherly advice although she was sobbing in between. My father was also feeling rather sad but he left earlier than usual to go on his rounds to collect feathers. He wanted to fetch me to Clifford Pier but I refused knowing very well that I may find it hard to leave him.

I struggled to finish the bowl of porridge and after that, bade a quick farewell to my mother, brother, sisters and my neighbours. I grabbed my luggage and rushed down to hail a taxi for Clifford Pier. I felt terrible, sobbing throughout the journey to Clifford Pier. I learned later that my father made a detour to Clifford Pier to try to meet me before I boarded the crew boat to the anchorage but by the time he arrived, I was already on my way out in a motor boat chugging towards Kota Singa. Kuan, knowing my emotional state, was thoughtful enough to meet me at the pier to help me begin this emotional journey.

Kuan's ship was plying regularly between Singapore and Bangkok and in my case, it was a known fact that the Ocean Promoter would not call at Singapore. I was told that Ocean Promoter was a tramper and as the name implies, it had no fixed trading routes. As an old lady, she did not have the luxury of choice liner routes. Instead she had to sail to anywhere where she could pick up a cargo to fill her cavernous cargo holds. The master and officers of Kota Singa were sympathetic and helped me get accustomed to life at sea. It was a 3-day trip to Bangkok. It was a lonely existence with me holed up in the cabin still in an emotional warp. Kuan was working very hard as a deck apprentice and the sight of him sweating profusely in his working gear made me wonder whether my fate would be any better. Food on that ship was very spartan and compared to the meals we had on ships we had visited in our school days, it was a real let down.

The arrival at Bangkok's outer anchorage cheered me up a little although I was still terribly homesick. The sight of many long tail boats, river cargo barges, golden glazed temples on both sides of the river and other ships along the Mekong Chao Praya was interesting but somehow, without my loved ones around, I found the enchanting beauty rather devoid of attraction. I wished then that my family could be around to take in the scene. I longed to see them. I missed the joy of being together and the joy of eating together even though we may not have had abundance at home.

The ship's agent put me up in Fuji Hotel in downtown Bangkok. I waited 10 days in Bangkok for the arrival of Ocean Promoter. Bangkok was a very bustling and busy city even in the 60s but despite the long break in Bangkok with all expenses paid accommodation and food; I did not have the mood to explore Bangkok. In any case, I kept the S$60 as a contingency and did not fritter it away on sightseeing. It was a miserable time and I did spend a fairly long time praying for calmness and protection as I weighed the prospects ahead of me.

Despite all the preparations for a career like this, I found myself very vulnerable and fearful of the uncertainties ahead. The prospect of facing life alone for the first time in a strange environment was quite overwhelming. In those days, young men like us were not as well traveled as the youths of today. Mainly for financial reasons, we did not have the luxury of traveling to other countries. A never-ending stream of fear and self-doubts seared through my mind. The owners were more than fair to me. I was not given any spending restriction and for a novice cadet like me, I was allowed to sign for anything I consumed in the hotel.

On the 10th day of anxious waiting, Ocean Promoter finally arrived at Bangkok. She was secured to the midstream buoy of the Klong Thoay Harbour in downtown Bangkok. On the day before, the agent had advised me to get ready to board ship with him on the morning of the ship's arrival. I was very excited to join my training ship and this excitement gave me a sleepless night.

The next morning, the boarding officer from the agents' office checked me out of the hotel and we made our way to the ship. From the pier, Ocean Promoter was pointed out to me. The sight of Ocean Promoter sank my heart. She was probably the most unsightly ship among the many ships that were lying alongside Klong Thoay Harbour or secured to midstream buoys. She was a rusty looking hulk with paintwork peeling and black curling smoke belching from her smokestack. I knew that Ocean Promoter was the oldest ship in the fleet but mentally was not prepared to see a ship in such a state of disrepair. The only unique feature was a clean and large British Ensign flying from her stern. To me, she looked like one of the worst maintained British flagged ships around as compared to say, the well kept and pristinely painted Blue Funnel ships plying in the Far East /Europe Service. As our long tail boat made her way towards Ocean Promoter, I saw many bumboats lying alongside her busily disgorging their cargo of bags of rice.

The ship was then in light ship conditions and even as we approached her, the rattling sound of her steam driven winches was really ear splitting. When I reached the main deck after a perilous climb up the dangling wooden gangway with a heavy luggage in tow, I was greeted by a motley crowd of Thai stevedores and the pungent smell from open cooking stoves (stevedores cooking Thai curries for lunch) temporarily placed on deck. I tried to make sense out of this confusion and made my way to the upper deck of what I perceived to be the officers' quarter, to report to the Captain.

On reaching the second deck (officers' deck) which was out of bound to outsiders, I saw a fair complexion Chinese man lounging around clad in a white singlet, crisp white short trousers and wearing a pair of rubber slippers. I thought he must be one of the stewards serving the officers and I approached him to enquire the directions to the Captain's quarters. We exchanged some niceties and I asked him whether he was working in the catering department, to which he nodded. He told me to climb another two decks and then he disappeared. Still dragging my luggage, I stopped in front of the Captain's Cabin and knocked. The man that opened the door for me was the same steward whom I met two decks below. I was lost for words and on seeing the awkwardness, he welcomed me into his air-conditioned quarters (the only cabin onboard the ship that was air-conditioned) to sign the necessary papers and gave me a briefing before I was passed over to the Chief Officer who was ultimately responsible for my training. I had committed a most unthinkable error by mistaking the master of the ship as a steward!

In my mind and from what I had been taught in school, a captain is someone who is authoritative and well dressed in uniform. I had not expected to see a captain in such casual attire outside his quarters. I tried to apologize for this baffling mistake and made amends by working very hard in the days that followed. I chided myself for this mistake and felt relieved only when this Captain, (a British Chinese residing in Hong Kong) handed me HK$100 to buy some working gear. I did not have money to buy any working clothes and this Captain must have taken pity on me as he gave me some cash from his own pocket.

The next few days onboard opened up an entirely new world to me. I followed a strict regime of working with the deck crews during the daytime and in the evening, was assigned to accompany the duty officer to keep cargo watch if the ship happened to be in port. If the ship was at sea, I was supposed to do a two hour steering stint on the bridge. Thereafter I was free to do my correspondence schoolwork.

I worked with the deck crews but was not supposed to mix with them. As a Cadet, I was supposed to behave like an officer to be. Hence I was (by the British tradition) required to dine with the officers and engineers only. This became a cumbersome thing as in between the hot and stifling heat, I had to change into the officer uniforms to enter the officers' dining saloon. This was rather

surreal as one moment, I was in the dirtiest attire toiling on deck with the crew and the next moment, I would be decked out in white uniform, long stockings and black shoes to dine as a gentleman.

Dining in the officers' saloon was a very formal affair. For someone who was accustomed to the communal style of eating, it was quite a struggle to acquire some finesse in table manners. It took me quite a while to get adjusted to the daily routine of having western breakfast, western lunch and Chinese style dinner. As the most junior officer, I was seated at the far end of a long table. The seating arrangement was according to ranking protocol. As a cadet, I was always served last and despite my vigorous work on deck which was physically demanding, I found with much distaste that the stewards would always serve the best choice cuts of meats and fruits for the captain and senior officers. The smallest piece of food, whether it is meat, egg or fruits, was always reserved for me.

I had diverted a little but now let us get back to the issue of settling in. I was ushered into the cadet cabin in the officers' quarters, which was quite different from the spartan crew quarters. The cabin for two was quite comfortable and the ship bed in particular was very impressive. Ocean Promoter was built in 1950 in Glasgow. Hence the wardrobes, book rack, thermos flask holder, writing table and the beds were made of mahogany wood and the cabin was very comfortable. I liked the design of the bed so much that years later; I designed a similar bed for my daughter in her bedroom although the workmanship was nowhere near the refined skills of the British craftsmen in the 50s. As a cadet, I was supposed to do my own laundry and was responsible for the upkeep of my cabin. Changes for the bed sheets and pillowslips were issued by the catering department.

As it turned out, my work in the deck department was more demanding than that of Kuan on Kota Singa. I was given a tight timetable to follow, but it was a very orderly life style and the hectic work schedule did help me to focus my mind and forget about homesickness. I was very much determined to succeed at sea. The career path for a merchant navy officer is very impressive if one can stay the course of a very rigorous regime of professional and character training. During the first few days onboard, I was very fortunate to know one British graduate student by the name of Jim Cromarthy.

On graduation, he decided to see the world by working onboard ships as a supernumerary. When I joined Ocean Promoter in Bangkok, he was about to disembark to join another ship to Singapore. I was very much encouraged by his sharing and friendship. His encouragement helped me to settle in. He was to become a good family friend of ours as I introduced him to my family when he arrived in Singapore. He was the first to bring back news of my experience in Bangkok to my family as in those days, we did not have the luxury of long distance phone calls or fax or mobile phones.

Some initial embarrassing situations

During my first few months at sea, there were some embarrassing moments, which were really instructive. In the first instance, I was so used to speaking English in Singapore that when I joined ship, I took the view that English would naturally be the language to be spoken onboard. After tolerating me rattling away in English for the first few days, the Second Officer, a very gentlemanly officer from Tianjin but residing in Hong Kong, finally put it to me that he felt uncomfortable at my habit of conversing in English. He made it clear that as we were all Chinese, I should converse in Mandarin or Cantonese and if I am not good in Chinese, I should make it a point to learn.

That was a rude awakening for me and it also set me thinking about my Chinese heritage. Serving onboard the Ocean Promoter with a predominately Chinese crew made me conscious of my roots in the Chinese culture and language. My interest in the Chinese language was kindled during my service onboard the Ocean Promoter.

The second embarrassing situation had something to do with food. For the first few months onboard, I really enjoyed the western style lunch and breakfast. It was a luxury which I would never have imagined possible for a career onshore. Before making a living on the high seas, I had never eaten anything like a piece of steak or half a roast spring chicken for lunch. I enjoyed it so much that in the beginning, I asked for two helpings of beef steak or an additional helping of beef stroganoff if the galley (kitchen) was able to spare me an additional helping. My appetite was exceptionally good, perhaps driven in part by the demanding physical work. I wonder what others must have been thinking of this uncouth young man who had such a voracious appetite.

The table etiquette during the Chinese style dinner also became a source of painful embarrassment for a rough and unpolished Chinatown kid unaccustomed to the finesse of Chinese dining. At home, we were used to a common soup bowl and a shared sauce plate. On the ship, four of

us shared a dining table but for hygienic reasons, we had to use separate sauce plates and individual soup bowls. None of us consumed soup from a common soup bowl and I was ticked off by an unsympathetic engineer during my first Chinese meal onboard for dipping my spoon into the common soup bowl. It was a very embarrassing experience.

If this was embarrassing and insulting, the next lesson drove me to tears. One night we were having dinner and one of the dishes served was steamed fish. Since the top half had been consumed, I decided to turn the fish over for the convenience of the others. It was a kind gesture on my part. The next thing I knew was that my right wrist was inflicted with a sharp pain from a pair of chopsticks whacked with considerable force. This was really uncalled for. I was hit by the 3rd Engineer who was so enraged by the fact that I had turned the fish over without first breaking off its head. I was furious and could not control my tears. In my entire life, no one had ever hit me for such an insignificant and petty mistake. It was absolutely devastating. I learned later that turning a fish over without first breaking off its head is almost an unpardonable sin in the eyes of Chinese seafarers. It is a very sensitive issue for if one turns the fish over without breaking off its head, it signifies that the ship would capsize – a very bad omen indeed.

My first winter in Japan was almost comical. I was shivering from having insufficient protection against the bitter cold. It was no laughing matter to have to work on deck in the howling winds and driving rain without proper protection from the elements. The carpenter felt sorry for my plight and mobilized his colleagues to spare me some cold weather working gear. On arrival at Yokohama, he even took me to Yokohama train station to buy a bountiful supply of used winter clothing which was really cheap and affordable. I obtained my first suit and overcoat (second hand no doubt) at unbelievable bargain prices!

My parents believed that wearing handed down clothing from strangers should not be encouraged for the obvious reason that such clothing could have come from the dead. But in those blustery conditions, it made no difference whether the handed down clothing came from the dead or the living. The thing that mattered was affordability! To me, our God is such a wonderful provider. He had proven time and time again that His grace is sufficient for me. When He leads us into any situation, He will not leave us there alone in desolation. In His own timing and graciousness, the provision will come. Here, He used the carpenter to help me.

During one of our port calls at Niigata, a port along the western seaboard of Japan in 1969, we were hit by a snow blizzard. The ship was covered with thick snow and so was the city. Being my first visit to this cold city, I wanted very much to see how different it was from those cities on the eastern seaboard. In those days, traveling within a city in Japan can be relatively inexpensive by using public transport and in all my port calls; I was accustomed to traveling by bus and not taxi. This was necessitated by economical reasons.

During this visit, it was no exception and I was trying to run after a bus, which was about to pull away from the bus stop. My attempt to run sent me skidding and tumbling in front of other Japanese bystanders. I was wet and got up sheepishly. It was then that I discovered that no one was wearing leather shoes but they were wearing anti-slip shoes suitable for icy conditions. Coming from a tropical background, I had no idea about the different kinds of shoes. Even if I had known, it would not have been my priority as it was quite costly.

As I look back, our God is a teacher extraordinaire. He is never far away even in embarrassing and humorous situations. He is teaching us all the time and most important of all, we must take note of the lessons learnt and move on. I felt terribly insulted and hurt when I was hit by the 3rd Engineer. But I did not allow this unhappy episode to mar my overall objective in life. I admitted that in my moments of self-pity, I did shed some tears in my cabin over this incident, but in my loneliness, the Lord was ever so kind. He ministered to me in my prayers. The hurt was removed and the bitterness, which would have coloured any relationship if I had allowed it to fester; was relieved. As it turned out, one year on, this same 3rd Engineer who hit me, became one of my good friends onboard Ocean Promoter.

Something about s.s. Ocean Promoter

For some strange reasons, Ocean Promoter was the only British registered ship owned by the company. All the other ships in our fleet were registered in Liberia. Whilst it was then our company's general policy to employ only British certified masters, in the case of Ocean Promoter, it was a statutory requirement that only a British citizen can be the master of a British ship.

The running of the ship, ranging from the official documentation of shipboard operational events down to the specific details such as that of lifeboat provisions, scale of medicine carried, the size of the sickbay and the quality and quantity of food supplied to her crew had to be in conformity with the requirements of the then British Board of Trade. Complying with the rather strict regulations was quite a burden to my employers who certainly found running a fleet of Liberian registered ships so much easier.

One of the masters had even shown me a fairly large sealed envelope marked with “On Her Majesty’s Service.” The serving master can only open this envelope in times of war. We also carried onboard a delicate range finder, which if mounted, can allow the operator to co-ordinate with the gunner in respect of the range of the enemy vessel. As a ship, we were not armed with any high calibre weapons but given the high ratio of losses of convoy shipping during World War ll, it is probable that a merchant ship would be armed in times of war to improve her survivability.

Ocean Promoter was built in Glasgow in 1950 and weighed around 9000 gross registered tons. She was of riveted construction and was probably the last in the line of her class. Her design was what mariners would call a “three island ship” i.e. with a raised forecastle in the bow section, mid-ship accommodation for the officers and engineers and a raised poop deck at the stern which housed the crew living quarters. Her funnel or smokestack was straight and upright and totally devoid of the imaginative flow lines of a modern ship. She was designed with five cargo holds which were further configured into tween deck and lower hold.

I was probably sailing on one of the last few remaining steam driven ships in the world. Many mariners I met at different ports were surprised that an old steam ship like Ocean Promoter was still in service because by the late 60s, diesel driven engines had almost totally eclipsed steam driven engines. Ocean Promoter was powered by a huge steam reciprocating engine but with a low mechanical efficiency ratio. The steam required to drive the huge reciprocating engine was produced by three massive boilers. She could only achieve a maximum speed of 10 knots and most of the time; we were managing something less than 10 knots unless aided by following surface currents.

All the cargo winches and anchor windlass on deck were steam driven and very noisy. The steam pipes on deck frequently burst, resulting in the frequent breakdown of the winches. In winter and in particular during snow conditions, starting the winches in the morning was nightmarish although to be fair, the smell and the heat of the hissing steam from the steam pipes gave us much needed warmth when working on deck in freezing winter conditions.

Before converting to the oil fired boilers, Ocean Promoter’ massive boilers had probably been fired by coal because she had such a huge storage space for coal. The biggest problem about operating an old steam ship was finding enough steam proficient engineers to operate her. By the late 60s, almost all the engineers were proficient in diesel engines but not steam engines. We had a team of Shanghai-born steam engineers who had served onboard Ocean Promoters on repeat contracts and the owners were very afraid of losing their services. We were also plagued by the lack of engine spares as most of the makers had ceased production of steam engine parts. We had frequent breakdowns of the main and auxiliary engines due to burst steam piping or partial collapse of the boilers’ tubing but thank God, our resourceful engineers could cannibalize parts from other machinery or fashion some parts to keep the engine in operation.

I also recall very vividly the terrible heat during summer and the coldness in winter when the heating could not be individually regulated. The living condition onboard was almost unbearable during the summer months in the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and Egypt. There was one incident in Aqaba, Jordan, which left a dreadful impression on me. We were loading phosphate in Aqaba during the summer months. The whole ship was covered in fine dust and coupled with the intense summer heat, it was almost impossible to sleep in our cabins. The more adventurous amongst us chose to try to sleep on deck in the open air although there wasn’t any breeze and the air was very heavy. I could not stand the insipid air, and so I decided to strip off most of my clothing and slept on deck. I was awakened in the early hours of the morning by some sharp bruising pains on my back. There was a fierce sand storm blowing over the area and the fine particles peppered my exposed back like sandpaper.

The pain was like multiple pin pricks and the exposed wounds were followed by blisters, which lasted for some time. It was an awful and painful experience. Later, I was told by the Jordanians that no matter how hot the weather is, one must never remove clothing in desert conditions to avoid exactly the type of blisters which inflicted me. That was probably why the Arabs

always chose to cover their whole body in flowing cotton robes, including the face if possible, even in the most stifling summer heat.

Despite the seemingly unattractive living and working conditions onboard, I was to remain on this ship for slightly more than 24 months. As I have mentioned before, Ocean Promoter was a tramper. The tramping trade is the most undesirable amongst seafarers because of the uncertainty of trading areas. In the beginning, in my audacity, I questioned God why of all ships; I was assigned to this old steamship and of all things, why I was posted to a tramper. There were times when I was really envious of the lot of my three other classmates who had been posted to the same company. Unlike me, they were training on air-conditioned and newer ships and certainly, their trading routes were more predictable.

In my ignorance, I did not know that God had actually chosen the best ship and the best training possible for me. First and foremost, Ocean Promoter was the only British registered ship in our fleet and the ship management and practices I learned onboard conformed to the British merchant navy standard, which was higher than ships of other registries.

Secondly, Ocean Promoter was a broken down ship in many aspects and those of us serving on her had to deal with operational constraints and equipment failures almost as a routine. We had to use every bit of our ingenuity and resourcefulness to keep her afloat and to save her from the scrap yard. It was in this context that my training onboard was really worth the experience. I had the opportunity to experience many accidents and events that those serving on newer ships would never have experienced. This quality would serve me in good stead in my future career ashore as a surveyor and later as an arbitrator. This kind of training developed in me a wealth of resourcefulness to confront any intractable difficulties whilst working towards resolving it.

During the two years of service, I visited many ports, some of which were secondary ports, i.e. they were far away from the normal trading routes. Many of these ports were very out of the way of the main line carriers. Only trampers like us would search for cargo in some of these secondary ports for carriage to principal ports. Some of the ports we called at included Bangkok, Yokohama, Kobe, Nagoya, Niigata, Fujiki, Moji, Kaohsiung, Kuantan, Wallace Bay (Malaysia), Jakarta, Belawan, Rangoon (now Yangon), Chittagong (formerly East Pakistan, now Bangladesh), Madras(now Chennai), Vishakaptnam, Cochin, Goa, Colombo, Galle, Trincomalee (Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon), Karachi (Pakistan), Muscat (Oman), Aden (Yemen), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), Aqaba (Jordan), Safaga (Egypt) and Djibuti (Somalia). We visited many of these secondary ports more than once.

It is a very challenging task for any Captain to bring his ship to so many of these out of the way ports. In many instances, it would be their first visit to some of these ports. The sea approaches to many of these ports were not charted properly and the navigation aids in place to guide a ship into port were often in a state of disrepair or simply non-existent. Making landfall to not too well known ports taxed the skills of the shipmasters to the limits. This was more so in the case of Ocean Promoter as our only radar was out of the service most of the time and neither was she fitted with long range radio equipment for position fixing. In those days, many modern ships were fitted with LORAN but for us, we had only the steering wheel, sextant, magnetic compass (we did not even have a gyro compass), echo sounder (not working most of the time), binoculars, a bountiful supply of nautical directions and some outdated charts. However, we had an abundance of human ingenuity.

Making landfalls without the aid of modern navigation equipment can be hazardous as the approaches to port were quite often littered with shallows and rock outcrops. I remember that during our approach to Safaga, Egypt, there was only a deep channel and on both sides, there were huge outcrops of shallows and reefs. Captain Vizer, the master at that time, did a fantastic job of bringing our ship in despite the absence of serviceable radar and an echo sounder. We circled the approaches in the darkness to wait for daylight. When the sun emerged above the horizon behind us, the deep water channel before us was so clearly visible against the light green waters of the shallows and reefs. This type of interesting navigational skills reveals a man's resourcefulness in overcoming a difficult disadvantage.

It was through numerous such encounters when every ingenuity and resourcefulness was kept on a fine edge that we managed to deliver our services despite the fact that we were operating a very old ship with limited spare parts. I had wonderful opportunities to learn many fundamental skills, skills that did not depend on equipment but on the natural wonders which God had provided to aid navigation as in the days of old. I can never forget what Captain Vizer had reminded me that '*in the days of sails, we had wooden ships but men of iron will but in the days of steamship, we have steel built ships but wooden men.'*

Whilst such experiences may seem tough and unenviable at that time, it was actually God's gracious way of training and preparing me for the numerous challenges in the later stages of my life. Running one's own business with no guaranteed income and an uncertain future required a great deal of faith in God. The use of God's given resources and human ingenuity to look beyond one's immediate problems and trust in God became the rallying standard for me to survive the roller coaster fortunes of life. It was the valuable experience acquired onboard the Ocean Promoter which hardened and toughened me. If God had assigned me to a brand new ship with desirable trading destinations and top of the range equipment, I would probably have grown complacent and inflexible to changes and demanding situations.

Before closing this section, I must add that the age of the ship has no bearing to a happy ship. It is ironical that the happiest ship in my entire seafaring career happened to be Ocean Promoter. The relationship among the crew was bonded by team work and by enduring the challenges together. There was no room for individualism. You needed teamwork to keep the ship in operation. I take pride in all the ships I had sailed on but my greatest pride rests with Ocean Promoter. I served with different masters and finally with Captain Vizer on the Ocean Promoter until she was scrapped in Japan in early 1970. Capt Vizer was the last to leave the ship and I (3rd Officer at that time) was the second last to leave the ship. I was so overcome by emotions that I wept when I walked down her gangway for the last time. The memories of the struggle, the pain and the joys of overcoming so many odds together with a great crew and a marvelous Captain have ignited in me sweet memories as I pen this story.

David Lee Fook Choon
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Lee Fook Choon left Poly in 1967 to pursue a sea career and went through many phases of certification examination until he obtained his Master Mariner Certificate in 1978. He had a rewarding sea career which took him to more than 120 ports in 5 continents. He came ashore in late 1978 to begin a shore career with an insurance loss adjusting firm. In 1984 he formed a local marine loss adjusting firm which remains in operation to this date. In 1994 he went to pursue his maritime law studies in Cardiff and concurrently work towards his arbitrator's qualifications. He is now a Chartered Arbitrator and a Chartered Insurance Practitioner and practising as a near full time marine arbitrator in Hong Kong, Singapore and to some extent in London.